

INQUIRY INTO THE U.S.S. PUEBLO AND  
EC-121 PLANE INCIDENTS

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REPORT  
OF THE  
SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE U.S.S. PUEBLO  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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In addition to the receipt of oral testimony from the witnesses identified above, the subcommittee submitted numerous written interrogatories to both the Navy and the Department of Defense concerning matters pertinent to the subcommittee's inquiry. Most of these responses and supporting documents were classified. However, the pertinent information provided will be incorporated in this report to the maximum extent compatible with security considerations.

In addition to these documents, the subcommittee was privileged to review the proceedings of the U.S. Naval Court of Inquiry conducted on the U.S.S. *Pueblo* matter. These proceedings, both those in open and closed session, were provided the subcommittee by the Secretary of the Navy and his Judge Advocate General.

The report which is now being submitted by the subcommittee, represents to the best of its ability, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations reached on the basis of the testimony and documentary material that it has reviewed.

#### THE MILITARY RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM—GENERAL

The U.S.S. *Pueblo* was one of a series of surface intelligence collection ships specializing in electronic and communications intelligence. Similarly, the EC-121 was a naval aircraft especially configured as an airborne vehicle for intelligence collection activity.

The operation of both the U.S.S. *Pueblo* and the EC-121 was part of our national effort to gain information concerning our potential enemies. The security of the United States requires that we be aware of, and understand fully, the military capabilities of potential enemies. The best means of collecting and analyzing such information must, therefore, be considered and exploited.

As a consequence of the foregoing national security considerations, the United States engages in overt and covert surveillance with aircraft and ships in order to acquire essential technical and operational information.

The Pentagon believes that this information is essential to our own self-defense. Pentagon witnesses stated that:

It is a vital element in the development of plans for contingencies which we must expect to face and in the development of new weapons systems needed to prevail against potential enemy military and technical advances. The failure of responsible authorities to guard against this possibility would constitute a dereliction of duty to the American people.

Military reconnaissance utilizing technical equipment to obtain acoustic photographic, radar, infra red and signals intelligence can be performed by both aircraft and ships. Each of these reconnaissance vehicles has its advantages and limitations. Each has proved of great value when effectively used, individually or together. For example, it is well known that "electronic intelligence, acquired by surface ships, led to the photographic intelligence from aircraft which gave us undisputable evidence of the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962. If we had not gathered this intelligence in such a timely manner, the consequences of a more extensive missile installation in Cuba would have been a far more serious threat to the security of the United States."

#### THE SURFACE RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAM

The national policy which established the program of constructing, equipping, and deploying noncombatant surface intelligence collection ships was one first approved by the White House in calendar year

1959. It was at that time that the defense cryptological program for fiscal year 1960 contained a provision for the conversion of a non-combatant type vessel for this purpose. Prior to that time, intelligence collection at sea was conducted by combatant ships. The Navy advises that there are certain significant disadvantages which accompany the use of combatant vessels for intelligence gathering purposes. These disadvantages as outlined by the Navy include:

(a) The withdrawal of an expensive combatant vessel from its normal, on station, duties with the fleet;

(b) The fact that combatant vessels, due to their special purpose configuration and space restrictions, do not lend themselves to an efficient and cost effective method of gathering intelligence data;

(c) The fact that warships are much more provocative to the world and, therefore, severely restricted in their operations; and

(d) The fact that warships are bound by various maritime treaties and conventions which do not apply to noncombatant ships.

These considerations apparently influenced the decision to utilize noncombatant vessels as surface intelligence collection ships.

The first noncombatant intelligence collection ship was commissioned in the New York Naval Shipyard on 8 July 1961. The ship was the U.S.S. *Oxford* (AGTR-1), and represented a configuration of a World War II, Liberty-type hull. The U.S.S. *Oxford* is still in commission and operating in the Southeast Asia theater today.

Subsequently, the *Georgetown*, *Jamestown*, *Belmont*, *Liberty*, *Valdez*, and *Muller* were commissioned for the same purpose.

Thus ultimately, a total of seven of these larger ships were configured and put into use. However, today only six are in operation. The seventh, the U.S.S. *Liberty*, had been severely damaged by the Israeli's in 1967 and was never restored to service.

However, it was not until early in 1965 that intelligence collection ships of the *Pueblo* class were actually authorized and converted. The program authorizing three ships for this intelligence collection activity was approved in 1965. The initial vessel approved for this type of activity of the AGER type was the U.S.S. *Banner*, subsequently followed by the U.S.S. *Pueblo* and the U.S.S. *Palm Beach*.

These ships are old World War II converted diesel-driven light cargo ships approximately 177 feet in length with a maximum speed of 13 knots and a cruising speed of 10 knots. They have an estimated range of 4,000 nautical miles. These ships were originally constructed for use by the Army as light cargo ships during World War II. After their inactivation by the Department of the Army about 1944, they were reactivated and recommissioned by the Navy and configured for their present intelligence collection function.

As previously indicated, in addition to the AGER class of surface intelligence collection ships, we presently have six larger vessels engaged in similar operations. These are converted Victory and Liberty ships fitted out especially for [deleted] intelligence collection and they are called AGTR's—Auxiliary General Technical Research.

Two of these ships are operated by the Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS) and are manned by civilian crews, while the others

are commissioned ships of the U.S. Navy and are entirely manned by naval personnel.

The essential difference between the AGER vessel and the AGTR lies in their capability. The AGER, being a much smaller vessel, has a more restricted collection capability. [1 line deleted.] The AGTR, on the other hand, is a much larger vessel and has a much broader intelligence collection capability. [1 line deleted.]

Although no cost data was provided the subcommittee on the comparative costs of operating these two types of surface intelligence collecting ships, it was clear to the subcommittee that the decision in 1965 to go forward with the AGER program in lieu of expanding the AGTR program was one undoubtedly influenced by the economics involved. Moreover, the subcommittee suspects that Navy enthusiasm and support for the AGER program was, not in small part, prompted by the prospect of acquiring its own fleet of surface intelligence collecting vehicles, independent of control by MSTC or the National Security Agency.

The subcommittee understands that phase III of the projected program ultimately contemplated the deployment of 12 to 15 ships of the AGER type.

#### NECESSITY FOR SEABORNE SURVEILLANCE

The Navy advised the subcommittee that seaborne surveillance has certain particular advantages. It is carried out on high seas where, prior to the *Pueblo* incident, under international law as commonly observed by nations of the world, a ship is part of the sovereign territory of the country whose flag she flies and, according to international law, is free from armed attack and seizure.

From the collection standpoint, a surface ship can provide continuous presence since she can remain on station 24 hours a day for an extended period. Also, ships are comparatively inexpensive to configure for the surveillance mission.

The Soviets recognize the value of the surface ship in this role and, in fact, employ a substantial number of unarmed intelligence collection ships, which are called AGI's, that operate freely, far from home waters and well beyond the protective reach of other Soviet forces.

Some of these AGI's occasionally have violated our territorial waters but none has been attacked or fired upon by our forces, nor has any of their crew been seized or killed. In fact, when these ships have been notified that they were in U.S. territorial waters and, in accordance with international law, were requested to leave, they did so.

The effort which the Soviets put into this peripheral intelligence collection points out its usefulness to them. It is of no less importance to the United States.

#### THE AGER PROGRAM CONCEPT

An AGER is an intelligence collector. It is specifically configured to collect signals intelligence (SIGINT) but also collects collateral intelligence and hydrographic information. Signals intelligence is comprised of electronic intelligence (ELINT) and communications